DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 332 805 PS 019 574

AUTHOR Lehman, Elyse Brauch; And Others
TITLE Temperament and Self-Soothing Behavior in Children: Object Attachment and Thumbsucking.
PUB DATE 20 Apr 91
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (Seattle, WA, April 18-20, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Affective Behavior; *Attachment Behavior; Comparative Analysis; *Individual Development; *Individual Differences; *Personality; *Young Children
IDENTIFIERS Rothbart Infant Behavior Questionnaire; *Thumbsucking

ABSTRACT

A new measure of temperament, Rothbart's Children's Behavior Questionnaire (CBQ), was used to compare children with attachments to objects and those without such attachments. Comparisons were used to determine whether temperament differences between children with and without a history of object attachment held for children with and without a history of thumb- and finger-sucking. Findings were expected to improve understanding of the origins of children's self-soothing behaviors. Parents of 86 children of 4, 6, and 8 years of age completed Rothbart's CBQ and the Object Attachment Questionnaire. Comparative analysis of the data indicated that children who were attached to objects more frequently enjoyed gently rhythmic activities, being sung to, snuggling up to a parent, taking warm baths, sitting quietly in the sunshine, and looking at picture books. There were no interactions between age and object attachment group. Compared to others, children with frequent thumb-sucking were rated as less likely to: (1) become excited about anticipated pleasurable events; (2) enjoy high stimulus intensity events; and (3) smile and laugh in response to changes in stimulus intensity. Findings support suggestions that individual differences in temperament are associated with the development of attachment to objects. Temperament characteristics were related both to whether or not an object attachment developed and the type of self-soothing behavior used. (RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED332805

Temperament and Self-Soothing Behavior in Children: Object Attachment and Thumbsucking

Elyse Brauch Lehman, Barbara Addy Holtz, & Kelly L. Aikey

George Mason University

Poster presented at the meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Seattle, WA, April 20, 1991.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Elyse Brauch Lehman
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PS 019574

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Although it has been suggested that individual differences in the various dimensions of temperament influence the development of attachments to objects such as blankets, pieces of cloth, soft toys, etc., the literature as a whole is sparse and frequently contradictory (Litt, 1986). In the present study, a new measure of temperament was used to compare children with attachments to objects and those without such attachments, Rothbart's Children's Behavior Questionnaire (CBQ). Rothbart's (1981) definition of temperament as individual differences in reactivity and self-regulation makes it a particularly appropriate instrument for comparisons of children with different histories of object attachment because of the role thought to be played by object attachments in young children's emotion regulation (cf. Kopp, 1989). Comparisons on the CBQ subscales were also made for children with different histories of thumb- and finger-sucking. Whether temperament differences between children with and without a history of object attachment will hold for children with and without a history of thumbsucking is a question that may lead to a better understanding of the origins of children's self-soothing behaviors.

Parents of 86 4-, 6-, and 8-year-old children who were participating in a larger study of self-regulation completed two questionnaires: The Children's Behavior Questionnaire (Rothbart) and the Object Attachment Questionnaire (OAQ). The 195 statements on the CBQ (e.g., "My child seems always

in a big hurry to get from one place to another.") are responded to on a seven point scale ranging from extremely untrue to extremely true based on frequency. Scores for 16 subscales are produced (see Table 1). The OAQ questioned parents about their child's object attachment history (e.g., age begun, age ended, intensity, type of object), thumbsucking habit, and pacifier use.

About two-thirds of the children in this middle to upper middle class sample were classified as having an object attachment either currently or previously. The percentages of 4-, 6-, and 8-year-olds who were currently attached were: 48%, 53%, and 28%; previously attached: 15%, 15%, and 40%; and never attached: 37%, 32%, and 32%, respectively. When the temperament data were analyzed with a 3(age) by 3(object attachment group) analysis of variance (ANOVA) for each of the 16 subscales, there was one main effect of object attachment group. Object attached children (whether currently or previously) scored higher on the Low Intensity Pleasure subscale than did children with no history of object attachments, $F(2,77)=3.83$, $p<.05$. That is, the former group was rated as more frequently enjoying "snuggling up" next to a parent, taking warm baths, sitting quietly in the sunshine, looking at picture books, being sung to, gentle rhythmic activities such as rocking or swaying, the sound of rhymes, etc. A main effect of age was found for two of the subscales: Low Intensity Pleasure, $F(2,77)=9.80$, $p<.01$, and Smiling and Laughter, $F(2,77)=3.85$,

$p<.05$. There were no interactions between age and object attachment group.

About one-fourth (24%) of the children in this sample were classified as currently having a thumbsucking habit and/or as having had one when younger. Eighty-six percent of this group of thumbsuckers also had an object attachment; 14% did not. However, many of the children with an object attachment were classified as never sucking their thumbs or as doing so only occasionally when younger (68%). The comparable figure for children with no history of object attachment was 90%. When the temperament data were analyzed with one-way ANOVAs between rare and frequent thumbsucking, statistically significant differences occurred on three subscales: (1) Approach/Anticipation, $F(1,84)=4.03$, $p<05$; (2) High Intensity Pleasure, $F(1,84)=4.14$, $p<.05$; and (3) Smiling and Laughter, $F(1,84)=4.31$, $p<.05$. On all three subscales, children with frequent thumbsucking had lower scores. They were rated as less likely to become excited about anticipated pleasurable events, less likely to enjoy high stimulus intensity events such as rough and rowdy games, and less likely to smile and laugh in response to changes in stimulus intensity (e.g., laughing out loud during play).

These results support suggestions that individual differences in temperament are associated with the development of attachments to objects. Temperament characteristics were related both to whether or not an

object attachment developed and to the type of self-soothing behavior used.

References

Kopp, C. (1989). Regulation of distress and negative emotions: A developmental view. Developmental Psychology, 25, 343-354.

Litt, C. (1986). Theories of transitional object attachment: An overview. International Journal of Behavioral Development, 9, 383-399.

Rothbart, M. (1981). Measurement of temperament in infancy. Child Development, 52, 569-578.

Table 1

Mean Temperament Scores on the Children's Behavioral Questionnaire as a Function of Soothing Behavior

Subscales	Object Attachment				Thumbsucking		
	Current	Previous	Never		Frequent	Rare	
Activity Level	4.93	4.62	4.78		4.55	4.89	
Anger/Frustration	4.86	4.69	4.60		4.56	4.79	
Approach/Anticipation	5.39	5.13	5.04		4.97	5.29	*
Attentional Focusing	4.68	4.79	4.43		4.78	4.57	
Attentional Shifting	3.97	3.96	4.08		4.02	4.00	
Discomfort	4.38	3.88	4.10		4.01	4.23	
Falling Reactivity/ Soothability	4.51	4.52	4.45		4.73	4.41	
Fear	3.91	3.51	3.82		4.01	3.72	
High Intensity Pleasure	5.25	5.17	4.93		4.77	5.24	*
Impulsivity	4.66	4.79	4.41		4.40	4.67	
Inhibitory Control	4.52	4.88	4.64		4.80	4.59	
Low Intensity Pleasure	5.69	5.57	5.29	*	5.55	5.46	
Perceptual Sensitivity	5.05	4.84	4.96		4.97	4.98	
Sadness	4.28	4.02	3.94		3.97	4.15	
Shyness	3.46	3.04	3.71		3.48	3.45	
Smiling & Laughter	5.75	5.45	5.67		5.41	5.74	*

* $p < .05$